

[REDACTED]

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CUBA

The Sino-Soviet bloc continues to increase and tighten its already close ties with the Castro regime. The four bloc embassies already established in Havana--those of the USSR, Communist China, Czechoslovakia, and Poland--are shortly to be joined by diplomatic missions from all or most of the seven other bloc countries now recognized by Cuba. East Germany remains the only bloc country still not formally recognized by Cuba.

[REDACTED] agreement has been granted for a Bulgarian ambassador and requested for a North Vietnamese.

A large number of visits are being made this month between Cuba and the bloc. The Cuban press announced on 26 January that a Soviet labor group headed by the secretary general of the USSR's Central Trade Union Council is en route to Cuba.

[REDACTED] a trip to Prague and East Berlin by two top Cuban labor officials

[REDACTED] the departure of a 15-person Czech cultural mission to Cuba.

[REDACTED] informed the director of Cuba's international propaganda agency that his counterpart in Hanoi would arrive in Havana in mid-March for [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]; a similar meeting of news agency chiefs is planned between the Cubans and North Koreans.

Travel between Cuba and the bloc has been facilitated by the weekly flights since early December between Prague and Havana by Cubana Airlines. The representative in Prague of a West European airline informed the American Embassy on 27 January that these flights generally carry about 80 persons to Prague and return to Cuba with about 50. Meanwhile, the Czechs are seeking Western overflight privileges for their own planned flights to Cuba.

More than 250 bloc technicians--mainly Russians and Czechs--already in Cuba as of mid-December include a wide range of specialists from bankers to geologists and industrial engineers.

[REDACTED] to the departure for Cuba of 18 more technicians and mentioned "brewing specialists" and specialists for water purification and sewerage projects in Cuba.

[REDACTED] the visit by three Czech engineers to Moa Bay. Soviet technicians had earlier shown an interest in the Moa Bay and Nicaro nickel installations, which were seized last year from their American owners, and Cuban leaders have announced that production will soon resume at these plants with the help of Soviet bloc technicians.

Meanwhile, Soviet bloc exports to Cuba, [REDACTED] now include heavy "forced metal

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bars," probably structural steel for the complete industrial plants promised to Cuba. Large numbers of automotive vehicles, some of them military, are also being shipped to Cuba from bloc ports on the Baltic.

The most recent Soviet military shipment to Cuba was probably aboard the vessel Volkhovges, which [REDACTED] arrived in a Cuban port on 29 January in ballast, presumably after having unloaded its 2,534-ton cargo in another Cuban port.

Cuba's controlled press and radio, reacting to President Kennedy's first press conference and his State of the Union address, are moving away from the "wait-and-see" attitude adopted by Fidel Castro toward the new US administration in his 20 January speech. Cuban radio stations on 30 and 31 January declared that the new President has "taken off his mask" and seems to be following the hostile "old Eisenhower-Dulles line."

Ecuadorean Foreign Minister Chiriboga sent word on 23 January to all American republics except the United States, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Peru proposing joint conciliation of "the US-Cuban problem" by the Latin Americans acting outside the framework of the Organization of American States or the United Nations. Chiriboga's initiative is arousing little support, in part because the incumbent Ecuadorean Government lacks prestige in the hemisphere.

In a speech on 28 January in Las Villas Province, Castro for the first time publicly acknowledged the extent of the counterrevolutionary threat there. He claimed that anti-Castro guerrillas, which he

said numbered over 500, in the Escambray Mountains are "fenced in to the point where they cannot escape. When these fences are strong enough, battalions of militia well and specially trained will advance on them."

Castro blamed the counter-revolutionary activity in Las Villas on the "bad" revolutionaries of the "Second Front of the Escambray," an independent group allied with Castro forces during the latter part of the anti-Batista revolution and then integrated into Castro's army. He said these "subversives have planted diversionist seeds throughout this province" and were awaiting help in their plans from the US. Therefore, Castro went on, "We now have to clean out all our offices in this province."

Castro pledged that military operations in the mountains and the purges in provincial offices would convert Las Villas into "the most revolutionary province of Cuba." Two days before Castro's speech, the leader of the "Second Front of the Escambray," Eloy Guterrez Menoyo, and a number of other Cuban army officers arrived in Key West by open boat seeking asylum.

Che Guevara, architect of the regime's statist economy and the official chiefly responsible for negotiating last year's economic agreements with the bloc, may soon receive a formal cabinet post. A usually reliable source with good contacts in Cuban newspaper circles reported on 24 January that Guevara is expected shortly to resign as president of the National Bank to take the new post of minister of industries. At present Guevara is said to be working with a group of Czech technicians on a program for Cuba's industrial development.

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OF IMMEDIATE INTEREST

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PART II

NOTES AND COMMENTS

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